

Marine Corps Intelligence Reform: Keeping Pace with an Evolving Intelligence Community

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Marine Corps Intelligence Reform:
Keeping Pace with an Evolving Intelligence Community

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The events of September 11, 2001 provide evidence that there is a need for intelligence reform in order to get actionable intelligence that could prevent such tragedies in the future. Therefore, bridging the gap between national level collection assets and tactical level operators is pivotal to future foreign and domestic operations. As Marine Major Reynolds stated, "The Marine engaged in combat must be pushed every pertinent piece of analyzed intelligence (drawn from the vast collection of disparate data) in a manner that is clear and tailored to his portion of the fight."¹ Marine Corps Intelligence needs to refine its human, signals and geospatial intelligence doctrine in order to bridge the gap with national level agencies. This will allow Marines to have a better picture of what type of enemy situations they will face that greatly reduces the uncertainty the commander must base his decisions from. An example of such reforms would be providing Marines as full time liaisons attached to the national level collection asset command structure in order to communicate the type of information required by the Marines on the ground. Liaisons with these commands will maximize the intelligence from each of these disciplines, but additional liaisons are still required.

¹ **Intelligence Support to Distributed Operations;** Reynolds, Robert W.; Marine Corps Gazette, December 2005.

BACKGROUND

In April of 2005, President Bush appointed a Director of National Intelligence (DNI) in order to implement strategic level reform in the Intelligence Community. According to President Bush, the role of the National Intelligence Director is to "assume the broader responsibility of leading the intelligence community across our government."² Before the DNI assumed these duties, the Director of Central Intelligence (DCI) was responsible for overseeing the entire intelligence community. The DCI was also the Director of the Central Intelligence Agency, but "Double-hatting the director of central intelligence as the director of the CIA limited his ability to stand above and orchestrate the whole intelligence community."³ While the long-term impact of a Director of National Intelligence is uncertain, how the Marine Corps' intelligence community plays its part in the reformation process will determine if the Marine Corps intelligence community is set-up for long-term success or destined to fail.

Operation Desert Storm identified numerous flaws in the intelligence community's ability to generate timely actionable intelligence. During this time, "The United States Marine Corps

² President George W. Bush's Remarks on intelligence reform, August 2, 2004.

³ Odom, William E. Fixing Intelligence for a More Secure America. New Haven and London: Yale University Press 2003.

(USMC) also recognized critical deficiencies in the functional area of intelligence and began an intensive review of its own system. Commanders at all levels of I Marine Expeditionary Force (I MEF) had expressed bitter dissatisfaction about the poor intelligence support they received prior to and during the war.”⁴ Based on the review of these deficiencies and recommendations, the Marine Corps created an Intelligence Battalion⁵ and a Radio Battalion.⁶ In addition, company grade intelligence officers received one of four military occupational specialties: Ground Intelligence⁷, Air Intelligence⁸, Signals Intelligence⁹ and Human Intelligence.¹⁰ Once promoted to Captain, these officers attend Marine Air Ground Task Force (MAGTF) Intelligence Officer Course

⁴ Major Raymond E. Coia, United States Marine Corps, A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF THE I MEF INTELLIGENCE PERFORMANCE IN THE 1991 PERSIAN GULF WAR

⁵ Intelligence Battalions provide HUMINT Marines, ground sensor platoons, and production and analysis capabilities.

⁶ Radio Battalions mission is to provide tactical SIGINT, ground based electronic warfare (EW), communications security monitoring (COMSEC) and special intelligence communications (SI Comms) support to the Marine Air Ground Task Force (from 2nd Intelligence Battalion Command Briefing, September 2005)

⁷ Ground intelligence officers primarily serve as platoon commanders in division reconnaissance companies. Infantry battalion scout/sniper platoons, and other ground intelligence assignments: Battalion, Regiment, and Division Staffs, Force Service Support Group, and Intelligence Battalion

(<http://usmilitary.about.com/library/milinfo/marineofficerjobs/bl0206.htm>)

⁸ Air intelligence officers function in a variety of intelligence billets located within the air wing. Billets include targeting officer, collections officer, dissemination officer and S-2 officer of a VMAQ.

(<http://usmilitary.about.com/library/milinfo/marineofficerjobs/bl0206.htm>)

⁹ Signals intelligence/ground electronic warfare (SIGINT/EW, officers command, or assist in commanding a SIGINT/EW unit and/or perform SIGINT/EW officer duties of a technical nature

(<http://usmilitary.about.com/library/milinfo/marineofficerjobs/bl0206.htm>)

¹⁰ Human source intelligence (HUMINT) officers serve in both counterintelligence (CI) and HUMINT billets. Duties include serving as CI platoon commander, Interrogation (IT) platoon commander and company executive officer within the HUMINT Company as well as serving as a division or MEF staff officer.

(<http://usmilitary.about.com/library/milinfo/marineofficerjobs/bl0206.htm>)

(MIOC), and are designated MAGTF Intelligence Officer.¹¹ This structural transformation in the mid 1990s has changed the Marine Corps intelligence community for the better and has produced well-rounded intelligence officers that understand all the resources at their disposal and how to utilize them.

HUMAN INTELLIGENCE (HUMINT) REFORMATION

During the war on terror, The Marine Corps has learned by trial and error how to adapt its HUMINT resources in order to exploit intelligence collected on indigenous populations. Due to internal adaptation and learning from their mistakes, HUMINT has come a long way since its transformation with the rest of the Marine Corps' intelligence community in the mid 1990s. The Marine Corps had to develop its own doctrine in HUMINT because the Director of Central Intelligence was also the national level manager for HUMINT. With no checks and balance system in place, the Director of the CIA was able to neglect the tactical HUMINT assets in order to focus his effort more on the strategic level. Now that the Director of the CIA focuses mainly on HUMINT, the CIA and Marine Corps should feed off one another's collection efforts because in many cases, the same information may be able to answer both agencies' information requirements. When it comes to actionable intelligence, it is critical that these

¹¹ Intelligence officers function as advisors to the commander and assist in carrying out intelligence responsibilities. They formulate plans, policies, and functions pertaining to all intelligence operations at all levels. (<http://usmilitary.about.com/library/milinfo/marineofficerjobs/bl0206.htm>)

organizations cross talk between one another to speed up the process of sensor to shooter.

The Counterintelligence/HUMINT (CI/HUMINT) Plans and Policy Branch (IOC), "Assists the Director of Intelligence in executing his responsibilities for developing and implementing Marine Corps counterintelligence (CI) and human resource intelligence (HUMINT) policy."¹², and should coordinate with the director of the CIA to implement changes in the future. Many of the necessary changes in the field of HUMINT developed during the war on terrorism have revolutionized HUMINT operations for the future. As such, with Marines' lives on the line everyday, there will always be the need to review the effectiveness of these resources.

SIGNALS INTELLIGENCE (SIGINT) REFORMATION

William Odom, former director of the National Security Agency, states that "of all the collection disciplines in the Intelligence Community, SIGINT is the best structured to exploit changing technology and to provide support to both national-level users and tactical military forces."¹³ The national level manager for SIGINT is the director of the National Security Agency (NSA), which employs both tactical and national level

¹² http://hqinet001.hqmc.usmc.mil/DirInt/code_ioc_uncl.html HQMC Intelligence Department

¹³ Odom, William E. Fixing Intelligence for a More Secure America. New Haven and London: Yale University Press 2003.

collection assets. Although the Marine Corps relies heavily on the NSA to provide additional collection assets within its area of operation, the Marine Corps has its own internal SIGINT assets. The innovations that have come from the war on terrorism at the tactical level need to be force fed to the strategic level in order to allow the rest of the military forces to benefit from the Marine Corps successes in SIGINT collection and exploitation. The Marine Corps, in most cases, is able to provide liaisons on-board aerial collection assets, which assists greatly in collecting the right information. Continued training with the national level collection assets as well as continued development of internal collection platforms needs to be a priority for Marine Corps' SIGINT.

IMAGERY INTELLIGENCE (IMINT) REFORMATION

The imagery intelligence system recently underwent a change at the national level and now has the National Geospatial Intelligence Agency (NGA) as its national level manager. However, due to the inability or lack of resources to collect on requested targets, the Marine Corps Intelligence Activity (MCIA) has had to fill the gap between NGA and units on the ground. For example, during Operation Iraqi Freedom, "after crossing the line of departure, the Division received very little actionable intelligence from external intelligence organizations. The Division had to assemble a coherent picture from what it could

collect with organic and DS assets alone.”¹⁴ This forced units in Iraq to task the Marine Corps Intelligence Activity to fill this void. The mission of MCIA is “to support the mission planning process with products and services that forward units do not have the capacity, time, or national access to accomplish themselves.”¹⁵ Consequently, MCIA is not suited to support current operations with its current mission and capabilities. MCIA is able to fill some of the void concerning IMINT with “a unique, secret-level national imagery intelligence (IMINT) data discovery and retrieval service via its imagery reachback site (IRS). The IRS maintains imagery of locations relevant to Marine Corps expeditionary operations.”¹⁶ MCIA has proven that they can support current operations, so the Marine Corps either needs to task MCIA to continue to do this and provide additional assets to do so, or develop an internal way to get current imagery intelligence. As is the case with HUMINT, the basic structure is there to support the tactical level, but there is a disconnect between the tactical and national level that prohibits the product from getting to the end user in a timely manner.

¹⁴ 1st Marine Division, Operation Iraqi Freedom, Lessons Learned

¹⁵ **Intelligence Reachback**; Downes, Eric S.; Marine Corps Gazette, December 2005

¹⁶ **Intelligence Reachback**; Downes, Eric S.; Marine Corps Gazette, December 2005

Needing more support from the national level IMINT organizations is not the only problem the Marine Corps has dealt with in the past. In their Lessons Learned, the 1st Marine Division noted, "the division found the enemy by running into them, much as forces have done since the beginning of warfare. The Pioneer worked great with the bureaucracy between VMU and the Division G-2 could be negotiated, but the lack of a habitual relationship and adequate rehearsal time limited our ability to do so."¹⁷ It is apparent that even though relationships between the tactical level end user in the Marine Corps and national level assets are in desperate need of reform, there are still problems within the Marine Corps' internal structure.

CONCLUSION

The establishment of a Director of National Intelligence should have a positive impact on the Marine Corps' intelligence community if it is able to make the appropriate changes. The shortcomings of the intelligence community prior to the structure change in the 1990s, forced the Marine Corps into finding innovative ways to either find a way to get the assets it needs or make what assets it has work. The ability of the HUMINT, SIGINT and IMINT communities to implement external liaison with national and theater level assets to either supplement or act as primary collection assets will indicate how

¹⁷ 1st Marine Division, Operation Iraqi Freedom, Lessons Learned

well the Marine Corps' intelligence community is able to adapt to the new structure at the national level. With the already existing reachback capability of the MCIA to use as a reference point, the Marine Corps' intelligence community needs to integrate better with the national and theater level in order to receive timely and relevant actionable intelligence. The lessons learned from the Global War on Terrorism have guided the Marine Corps towards integrating a working relationship between tactical and national level agencies. Integrating these liaisons into the transformation of the Marine Corps intelligence community assists in exploiting the full capabilities of the nation's intelligence collection assets.

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http://hqinet001.hqmc.usmc.mil/DirInt/code_ioc_uncl.html HQMC Intelligence Department